Technology Application in Teaching British Culture and English Literature: A Case Study at a Rural Teacher Training College in Vietnam

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Abstract— Using technology in English language teaching has been discussed widely. There have been numerous studies drawing on the effectiveness of using technology in improving students' learning English. However, those studies mainly focused on how technology was integrated to enhance students' English skills, not to deal with abstract and difficult texts from other subjects in the English language higher education programs like British Culture (BC) and English Literature (EL). As BC and EL are the core subjects in the English language teacher education program in Vietnam, a case study was conducted to explore the integration of technology in teaching those two subjects. This study had 60 student teachers of English and six lecturers at a teacher training college in the South of Vietnam. Data were gathered from surveys, interviews, focus groups and classroom observations. The findings show that thanks to the application of videos and multimodal resources that those lecturers structured communicative activities to engage students in meaningful practices.

Index Terms— British Culture, communicative language teaching, English Literature, technology

I. Introduction

In Vietnam, students of the English language teacher education programs have to be trained with knowledge about linguistics, culture, literature as well as English skills. Subjects including British Culture and Civilization, American Culture, English Literature always contain complicating contents due to their difficult and lengthy texts. Such subjects continuously create difficulties, boredom and massively demotivate students in learning English [1] [2] [3].

This leads to a huge obstacle for lecturers to implement communicative language teaching which has been promoted by the Vietnamese government and needs students' cooperation in the classroom [4] [5] [6]. How will lecturers solve this problem? This paper will report the use of technology from lecturers at a college in Vietnam to motivate and engage their students in learning those difficult subjects with positive outcomes.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Information communication technology (ICT) has been found to have various benefits in English language teaching: enhancing learning autonomy, motivating learners and maximizing the best learning outcomes [7], [8]. In addition, ICT was also implemented to promote higher order thinking skills [9] as well as writing skills [10]. Moreover, the advantages of using ICT can be found in facilitating teaching and learning process [11] and developing communicative language skills [12].

In Vietnam, although the role of ICT in education was highlighted in 2006, there have been great constraints to implement ICT in ELT classrooms due to the lack of equipment, facilities, and teacher training [13], [14]. Teachers were found to depend heavily on textbooks rather than internet resources [15]. To have an insight of the actual use of ICT, several studies have explored the use of ICT in Vietnamese EFL contexts. Tri and Nguyen [16] found that students used technology mainly for private purposes rather than for learning. On the other hand, Murphy, Midgley, Farley [17] reported that post-graduate students used mobile devices to help with their studies. One of the most popular functions of using ICT in ELT is improving students' English skills through different resources: computer-assisted language learning workshops for listening skills [18], blogs [19], Wikis [20] for writing skills, and the Internet for extensive reading skills [21]. Finally, ICT has also been used in enriching materials [22], learning vocabulary [23], [24], practicing pronunciation [25] and enhancing cultural understanding [26].

In conclusion, it seems that ICT has been found to be useful to a certain extent in creating an authentic language environment. However, as mentioned before, existing studies reported the benefits of ICT in assisting in teaching and learning English skills, but none of them explored how to use ICT to deal with difficult English texts in specific subjects such as EL and BC at the higher education programs. My study will fill in this gap. Furthermore, because previous studies relied mainly on surveys, they had the tendency to report on what ICT tools are used in EFL classrooms, rather



than exploring how those tools are used in a specific EFL class. Therefore, my research takes this further. It is going to report how ICT was integrated in EFL classrooms to deal with difficult long texts in EL and BC at a teacher training college in Vietnam.

III. RESEARCH CONTEXT & RESEARCH METHOD

This study belongs to a broader project which explored the teaching and learning of English in English language teacher education programs in Vietnam. The project addressed four research questions, and the content in this paper partially corresponded to this research question: 'How do lecturers' interpretations of communicative language teaching affect their teaching approach?'. The lecturers in this project were found to have positive attitudes towards communicative language teaching, and they believed that using technology in teaching was a part of communicative language teaching. As a result, technology was found to be applied throughout two subjects: BC and EL.

This study was conducted at a teacher training college in the South of Vietnam. There were 60 student teachers who were in the final year, and six lecturers participated in this project (12 observed classes). Data were collected from questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, and focus groups. All of the figures (photos) in this paper were primary data in this study.

IV. FINDING & DISCUSSIONS

During the classroom observations, lecturers were found to be implementing a combination of music, video clips, and PowerPoint (PPT) slides with the aims of creating opportunities for the students to interact meaningfully in English and dealing with the boring length of texts. In particular, music clips were used to raise students' interests in the texts. Video clips were used in two ways: first, lecturers frequently played videos to brief the contents of the texts, and lecturers requested students to produce their own videos after the lessons. Similarly, PPT slides were used in two ways: lecturers made PPT slides to contain visuals and to present language games to make the lessons more attractive and motivate students to speak, and students made PPT slides to do the group presentations as assigned by their lecturers.

A. Using music to raise students' interests in the texts

Music can be considered an effective pedagogical tool in English language teaching if teachers used it to motivate students' learning rather than simply filling time [27]. During the 12 observed classes, one lecturer used music before she introduced the long text to her students. This happened in EL class. On that day, the lesson was about William Shakespeare's biography and language. The whole text was six pages long. The lecturer played a very short track of an instrumental music (around 20 seconds) and elicited students:

Lecturer: What song is it?

Student: 'A time for us'

Lecturer: What song was the film in?

Student: 'Romeo and Juliet'

Lecturer: Who wrote 'Romeo and Juliet'?

Student: William Shakespeare.

Lecturer: Very good. Our lesson today is about

William Shakespeare...

By playing the music and eliciting students, the lecturer not only raised the interest in the lessons from students, but also reduced the tension that students might have against the lesson due to the long text. This finding is aligned with the study of Akhmadullina, Abdrafikova and Vanyukhina [28] which claimed that music could activate students' language activities and reduce their psychological tension. In another study, teachers used music in the middle of the lessons as exercises for students to practice English [29]. In contrast, another group of teachers tended to choose music for students to relax after a complex topic [30]. However, what the teacher in my study did was different from other teachers: limiting the tension, motivating students and activating their language. She did not use music just to relax students because this would distract students from the lesson [31] while she wanted students' focus on it. This is a significant difference between using music as a pedagogical tool and an entertaining tool in the classroom. Therefore, although there was only one lecturer among six in 12 classes using music in this way, it was worth to be noticed because using music as a meaningful pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms has been limited in research papers [32].

B. Using video clips to brief the context of the texts

Video clips have been widely used in the EFL classroom since the 1980s. Videos have the potential to bring rich information to the classroom. During the observations for this study, I noted a significant use of videos in the classrooms. Lecturers used videos to brief the key ideas of the texts and requested students to produce their own video clips after the lessons as group assessment.

1) Lecturers' videos

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In this study, ten videos were used in seven of the 12 classes. The majority of videos were edited by the lecturers. In the interviews, all the lecturers revealed that they first selected relevant videos on You Tube. They then edited the videos to fit the lessons by reducing the length or inserting captions. A minority of videos were created by lecturers using Movie Player. With the aims of shortening the written texts and creating opportunities for students to speak, a few lecturers used video clips to create task sequences. Five of the ten videos in this study were used in this way, but only two videos in two classes were demonstrated as examples in this paper. As mentioned before, in order to teach a lesson of EL about William Shakespeare, after using music to motivate students and activate their language, the lecturer began to play a video clip related to the text for students to watch and



note down key ideas. On her PPT slides, she showed photos to guide students what should be noticed. Looking at the photos on the slide, students knew they would need to find out the information of Shakespeare in four stages of his life while watching the video clip: his childhood, his adulthood, his career, and his death.

After watching the video twice, students were found to discuss in groups to share their notes. The lecturer later showed the answer keys on the PPT slides for students to compare and correct themselves. The following were data extracted from the field notes:

- * The class watched a video clip about Shakespeare's life with captions ... Students shared what they had noted.
- *Answers:
- WS was born on 26/4/1564 in Stratford- Upon-Avon, England. His parents were glove makers and sellers. He studied at a grammar school, but he left school when he was 14.
- He married Anna Hathaway when he was 18 and had 3 children. He lived in London and started his career there.
- His plays were histories, comedies but mainly tragedies. His famous works were Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Hamlet and Macbeth.
- He died on 23/4/1616.

Sharing this similar technique, the lecturer in BC classes used video clips following a task sequence when teaching a long and difficult text about the British Royal Family.



Figure 1. A still from a video

These are examples taken from field notes:

The lecturer played a video clip about the Royal family: names, relationships, roles ... Students took notes while watching ... Work in pairs to compare notes ... Filling in word sheets ... Working in groups to share.

Lecturers thus used the videos to overcome long texts and create opportunities for students to speak by setting up a series of tasks: watching the clips for brief information, taking notes/ filling in sheets, sharing notes in pairs/groups. The use of videos in this case was effective in student learning in both saving time and enhancing comprehension.

As the text was too long for students to read and remember in detail, the video provided a short summary to help them memorise only important details. As the text was difficult, the video offered visuals to help students follow the flow of the details easily. In addition, by following up with activities such as taking notes, sharing notes, and filling the sheets, using videos to provide a brief content lesson can create opportunities for students to speak as well as increasing students' recall of the lesson. These findings in this study have expanded the possibilities of using videos to deal with long texts rather than just demonstrating grammar points [33], [34], or teaching language skills [35]. Employing videos with task sequences is an effective way to help students understand the texts more easily, and help lecturers avoid textbook-bound issues.

2) Students' videos

As mentioned before, beside using the videos in the classrooms, lecturers of EL and BC all requested their students to make video clips as group projects for assessments. Reasoning for this requirement, in the interviews, these two lecturers said:

I want my students to do more reading at home. It may sound weird because it doesn't seem there's a connection between reading the texts at home and producing videos. But yes, there is. When they want to make their own videos related to the texts, they have to read those texts again and again. Whether they want to show their views towards the topics or develop the topics to a new angle, they all need to reread the texts carefully at home after they learned the lessons in the classrooms...When they make a video, they have to role play, they have to write the scripts, everything. These activities help them a lot in improving their language... (EL subject)

I believe that my students are very creative and intelligent, so I let them choose whatever they want to do in their clips. I think they always want to share their views on everything they learnt. Some of them may be shy to speak out in the classroom, but they can do it when working in small groups, with friends, and by making the videos. The videos will be about how they think about the lessons and how they link to the reality... (BC subject)

Two months after the classroom observations, I contacted the two lecturers to follow up the outcomes of students' videos. For BC classes, the lecturer collected four videos from four groups. The duration of each video was 20 minutes. The following pictures were cut from two of four students' videos. Figure 2 shows a scene of a wedding. In this video, students combined what they had learnt about British weddings, eating habits, greetings, the 'Dos/and Don'ts' when having conversations with others. The video was filmed



behind the college great hall. In figure 3, the story is about superstitions. Students made a video clip to compare some common superstitions in Western culture and those in Vietnamese culture. The video was recorded in a student's boarding house.



Figure 2. Students' role-play



Figure 3. Students' role-play

For the EL classes, there were also four video clips from four groups. The following photos were cut from two of them. Figure 4 shows a young couple saying goodbye after a date. In this video, students developed the theme of Romeo and Juliet in the modern time (Jacky and Rosy). This young couple were born in families that are their business opponents. In figure 5, students were role-playing a witch coming to meet Snow White in the modern world. In this video, students created a plot that after biting the apple given by the witch, Snow White was poisoned, ran along the forest to ask for help, fell deep down a mountain and travelled to the modern world.



Figure 4. Students' role-play



Figure 5. Students' role-play

When being asked about the quality of students' videos, both of the lecturers shared the same view that they valued students' effort in making the clips which required many steps to complete the projects. Therefore, although students still made errors in using the language, they all got good grades to pay off their creativity and hard work.

From the videos produced by students, it can be seen that making videos is a useful way for students to create the language in their own ways. However, in order to create something new, students have to go through the texts several times. This is a smart strategy that the lecturers used to promote students to deal with the long texts at home. In addition, making videos facilitates students' confidence, teamwork and develops their creativity. These findings were agreed by many researchers: Pisarenko [36], Akdeniz [37], Speed, Lucarelli, Macaulay [38], Kulsiri [39] and Rahayu [40].

C. Using PowerPoint

The final method the lecturers applied to overcome the long texts was to use PPT presentations to facilitate students' discussion, particularly by showing pictures and organising language games. Lecturers at this teacher training college used PPT to display key ideas from textbooks, create games, display photos and to play video clips or songs in the presentations to make the lessons more visual and more communicative for students, but this paper only described the significant use of PPT from the lecturers for organizing language games and the PPT presentations from students.

1) Lecturers' PPT for organizing language games

During the observations, lecturers were found to use PPT slides for organizing language games frequently. To deal with long texts, they used language games to review the lessons before teaching a new lesson, and before finishing a lesson.

To be more specific, instead of simply raising questions to review lessons, lecturers designed the questions as a language game. Questions were numbered in the middle of the screen, and the class was divided into two teams to compete against one another, using the resources for interaction. The most popular language games found in these classes were Lucky Numbers, Lucky Fruits, Lucky Animals which adds a bonus point for a picker, so students were found to be extremely



excited when playing these games. The lecturers also designed the language games Who Is The Millionaire, The Box, or Fishing to check students' comprehension after learning the texts. Figure 6 shows a PPT slide in the game The Box which has puzzles in the box pieces. By answering correctly a puzzle, a piece of the box was removed and students could have a chance to guess who is behind the box. The picture behind the box in figure 6 was Prince George, in the lesson about the monarchy (BC).



Figure 6. "The Box" game

In the focus group interviews, one student explained that PPT presentations encouraged the students to speak more because:

'I feel curious to see what happens next in the slides and how it links to the textbooks. It's very interesting.'

From the students' view, PPT games brought him both curiosity and excitement about the lessons. This view was confirmed when I observed the level of students' engagement and cooperation during the language games. Most of students were found to raise hands eagerly to answer lecturers' questions, as in figure 7. Therefore, it can be seen that using PPT slides as language games is very effective in attracting and maintaining students' attention leading to successful learning [41].

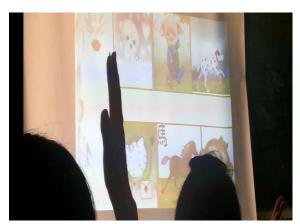
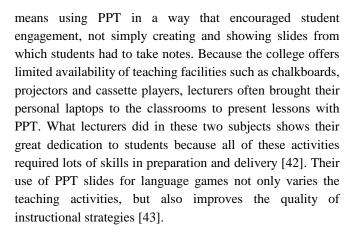


Figure 7. Students' cooperation

In the interviews, lecturers revealed that all the teaching staff at the college were required to attend training every year in using PPT to teach effectively in the classroom which



2) Students' group PPT presentations

As mentioned before, beside the use of lecturers' PPT presentations, students' presentations were also found in these two subjects: EL and BC. In the interviews, the lecturers revealed that when they first started the subjects, they grouped students and let students choose the lesson they would like to present. Students would have two to three weeks to prepare their PPT slides. In the observations, students were found to take over the role of a lecturer in the class when they presented a new lesson. After their presentations, their classmates would question them. This whole process was about 30 minutes. Then, the lecturers would give feedback and note key points of the lessons again. It can be seen that asking students to do PPT presentations is an effective way to deal with long texts because they will have to be well-prepared at home in order to present in front of the class. In addition, when they work in a group, they can help each other understand the content of the texts. Furthermore, asking students to do PPT presentations is also useful for students after graduation because they are going to be teachers. Therefore, this technique not only helps students overcome the difficulty of long texts, but also improves their teaching skills. Finally, it is also a meaningful opportunity for students to develop their oral presentation skills [44] and improve the quality of their PPT slides [45].

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this paper has just reported the integration of ICT in teaching British Culture and English Literature. This ICT technique included the use of music, videos edited by lecturers, videos produced by students, PPT language games by lecturers, and PPT presentations by students. This ICT use was found to have benefits in many ways in terms of raising students' learning motivation, simplifying the texts, making the lessons interesting, attracting students' attention and cooperation, varying teaching activities, improving the quality of teaching instructions, providing students chances to practice oral presentations, and giving students motivations to go through the texts more carefully beyond the classrooms. Therefore, this meaningful ICT integration should be considered to be used widely at a tertiary level where lecturers



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tend to be textbook-bound and show PPT slides for students to take notes traditionally. However, in order to make this possible, besides lecturers' dedication, necessary training in ICT must be provided.

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